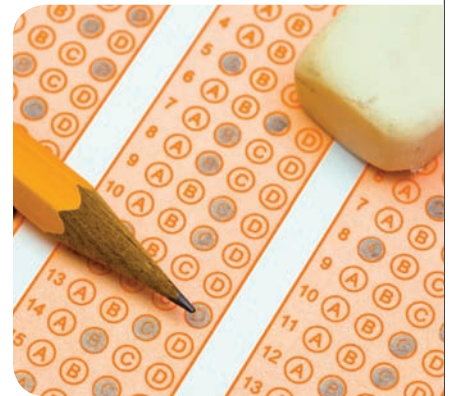


# *How to* NEGOTIATE WITH ADULTS

**THERE ARE MANY REASONS TO MEET WITH TEACHERS, YOUR PRINCIPAL AND OTHER SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ABOUT LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND QUESTIONING (LGBTQ) STUDENTS AND RELATED ISSUES.**

You may want to start a GSA, participate in the Day of Silence or organize a “lunch and learn” program for other students and teachers who want to learn more about LGBTQ youth. You are the best judge of the climate at your school. You may want to start by talking with supportive teachers and building from there. Whenever possible, try to get another student or an adult ally to go with you to the meeting. Many schools have procedures for hearing complaints, and some have designated hours set aside for students to voice their issues or concerns. Find out what the policies are at your school before you attempt to arrange a meeting.



## HOW TO NEGOTIATE WITH ADULTS

Most schools also have guidelines for handling student requests to organize clubs, activities or events. If you are planning to host an event like the Day of Silence (a daylong vow of silence to recognize and protest discrimination against LGBTQ students) or a Diversity Day (a day devoted to educational activities around issues like race, class, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity), chances are you will have to get approval from your principal or other administrators. When considering a student's request, a school must accommodate students' constitutional rights. At the same time, the First Amendment allows schools to restrict speech that is lewd, vulgar, indecent, or that substantially disrupts the work of the school or the rights of other students. In advocating for a Day of Silence or Diversity Day, be sure to stress that these events are expressive activities, protected by the Constitution, and that they will not disrupt the learning process or interfere with other students' constitutional rights.

The same principles apply when you are advocating for most LGBT rights and issues. Here are some other topics that might require a meeting with teachers and administrators:

- Forming a gay-straight alliance at your school
- Including sexual orientation or gender identity in your school's nondiscrimination policy
- Having a training on homophobia or LGBT issues

If you encounter discrimination, or have questions about your legal rights, please contact Lambda Legal's Help Desk at 1-866-542-8336 or email [legalthelpdesk@lambdalegal.org](mailto:legalthelpdesk@lambdalegal.org) for more information and assistance.

### TAKING ACTION:

## Aaron Fricke

Aaron Fricke asked Paul Guilbert to the prom — and Paul said yes. But Aaron's principal said no. Aaron knew he should be able to go to the prom like everyone else, and he filed a lawsuit. Not only did Aaron win the right to take Paul to the prom, but his school also had to provide enough security so that he and Paul would be safe. Aaron helped show that unless a school has reason to believe someone's date will cause a "substantial disruption," students must be allowed to go to the prom with the date of their choice. That was Rhode Island in 1980. Today the law still has power, thanks to Aaron.

## **HOW TO STRUCTURE THE MEETING**

### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND THOSE WHO HAVE COME WITH YOU**

Begin by stating who you are or what group you represent (for example, a gay-straight alliance).

### **BRIEFLY STATE THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING**

It may help to keep each meeting focused on a specific event, activity or problem rather than putting a wide range of issues on the table.

### **PROVIDE THE NECESSARY BACKGROUND**

Explain how the event, activity or problem has been handled at other schools and anything in your school's history that might support the event (for instance, if your school celebrates Women's History Month, that's a good precedent for celebrating LGBT History Month).

### **PRESENT A CLEAR AND CONCISE ARGUMENT**

Remember that your comments will be taken more seriously if you keep your tone professional and respectful and show that you've done your homework.

### **LISTEN TO ANY FEEDBACK AND/OR INITIAL RESPONSES**

It's important to understand your school's position, whether administrators and teachers are eager to help you or not.

### **SUGGEST NEXT STEPS**

Try to schedule another meeting while you have everyone there, and try to create a timeline for the school to make a decision.

### **DON'T FORGET TO SAY THANK YOU**

Behaving with courtesy and respect will leave teachers and administrators thinking well of you, and more likely to help you.